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ASB'S DIVIDEND PAYOUT HIGHER BY 0.25 PCT TO 10.25 PCT

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 4 (Bernama) -- Permodalan Nasional Bhd (PNB) will pay a 0.25 percent increase in dividends to 10.25 percent for its Amanah Saham Bumiputera (ASB) units for 1996 amounting to RM2,406.2 million compared with 10 percent or an allocation of RM1,932.5 million last year.

Bonus payments would however be maintained at three percent, according to a statement issued by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad, which was read out by PNB chief executive, Datuk Mohamed Hilmey Mohamed Taib at a press conference here today.

The total amount of dividends and bonuses of 13.25 percent were "reasonable" for a long-term investment with minimal risks such as the ASB scheme, the Prime Minister added.

PNB, which comes under the Bumiputera Investment Foundation of which Dr. Mahathir is the chairman, would also allocate RM3,103.3 million for the ASB scheme for dividends and bonuses for investment through 1996, which was up 23.9 percent from RM2,503.9 million the previous year.

The amount is the biggest paid since the Amanah Saham Nasional/ASB schemes were launched, he added.

For the bonus payments, ASB would for the first time allocate bonuses or free units to ASB investors. In previous years, the bonus was allocated by PNB.

He said that the allocation for bonus this year was at RM697.1 million from RM571.4 million. This works out to one bonus unit for every 33.33 units held.

"The ASB scheme's ability to pay bonuses is because investments for the year expanded in line with the composite index of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange," he said.

Dr. Mahathir also announced that ASB investors would receive their dividend vouchers and bonuses as well the manager's report beginning February, 1997.

To facilitate the payment of dividends and free units, all ASN and ASB transactions would be suspended at all agent offices, branches and at the PNB headquarters from Dec. 16, 1996 to Jan 1, 1997.

Transactions in the two schemes would continue as normal beginning Jan 2, 1997. However, transactions in the Amanah Saham Wawasan 2020 scheme, (ASW 2020), except for resales to PNB, could be undertaken and not subject to the suspension as that imposed on ASB and ASN transactions.

Dr. Mahathir said that the number of ASB units that would be created as at end-1996 would rise by 17.8 percent to 24,340 million units compared with 20,670.2 million at the end of last year.

He also said that for 1996, 25.9 percent of the total ASB scheme income was derived from dividends, 69.5 percent from profits from resales and the remainder from other sources, compared with 31.6 percent from dividends and 63.6 percent from resales in 1995.

He also said he hoped that investors would continue to maintain their dividends and bonuses in the ASB scheme and thereafter increase their investments as it was a long term, stable and profitable investment scheme.

"Besides this, investment through the capital market would ensure more productive investments and indirectly help contain inflationary pressures," he added.

"I once again want to stress that in whatever decisions it takes, PNB would continue to emphasise that Bumiputera investor interests in ASB were

undertaken in a prudent manner.

"PNB also ensures its highest commitment in safeguarding and managing ASB investments so as to consolidate Bumiputera equity in the corporate sector," the Prime Minister added.

According to figures released at the press conference, net total investments for ASB was at RM23,914 million with investors totalling 4.5 million as at Oct 31, 1996.

Total net investment on Dec 31, 1995 was at RM20,631 million with the number of investors at 4.2 million.

As at Nov 30, 1996, the number of adults having investment accounts stood at 4.107 million with investments totalling 24,076 million units compared with 399,814 investors with 197 million units.

The number of qualified investors for ASB accounts was at 6.857 million while that for the young savers account, it stood at 1.259 million.

The cumulative number of investors and the top five states with the highest number of investors in terms of percentage, was Wilayah 583,381 investors or 112.49 percent with an investment of RM4,237.388 million, Negeri Sembilan (199,501 or 75.48 percent with an investment of RM970.716 million), Pulau Pinang (209,406 or 66.01 percent with an investment of RM1,346.112 million) Melaka (147,038 or 59.2 percent with an investment of RM762.256 million) and Sabah (473,779 or 58.7 percent with an investment of RM1,568.396 million).

The top five ASB investors in terms of occupations were clerical with a net investment of of RM4,051.790 million, teachers RM1,947.845 million, self-employed RM1,011.550 million, armed forces RM836.425 million and settlers RM284.635 million.

Meanwhile, during a question and answer session, Mohamed Hilmey said PNB continues to buy and sell shares in various companies to bring maximum returns to unitholders.

Currently, PNB was not is discussions with anybody to sell any major equity in any of its companies, he said.

However, he added: "We will not talk about selling until the transaction has been completed."

On PNB's investment on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange, he said that at certain times, the amount of investment on the bourse was between five and 10 percent of the market's capitalisation.

PNB will buy shares when they are below their real value and sell when they achieve their real value. "We are not hasty."

"Currently, the returns from the market is neither low nor high. There is room for further growth or corrections," he said.

Asked whether PNB has entered the futures market, he said: "We see all new instruments and would enter if we fell we are comfortable with it. We have yet to make a decision." -- BERNAMA

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